

2021 WEBSITE & COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction

In January 2021 the Town conducted a Website and Communications Survey to measure community satisfaction with the recent website update, regular online communications, and crisis communications during the pandemic.

This survey is the fourth such survey in seven years. Longitudinal comparisons (changes over time) are included in this report to help identify trends, expectations, and perceptions of website visitors.

In October 2020 the Town updated the design of its website (arlingtonma.gov) with the goal of refreshing its look, streamlining content, improving navigation, and improving compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA). To the latter point, the updated website increased font size and increased color contrast.

Developed with the Town's website vendor, Granicus, the updated website also incorporates best practices for government sector websites. Much of the structure of the former website remains and the website continues to be responsive for mobile viewing.

Since March 2020 the Town expended a tremendous amount of effort to keep the community informed of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Town's response to it. The survey included questions to measure satisfaction with the content and frequency of these communication efforts.

The 16-question survey received 579 responses, providing valuable insight and guidance to assist our ongoing communication efforts.

The Town thanks survey participants for their valuable feedback and staff for their continued input.

Demographic Information

Number of respondents (in parenthesis).

Number of respondents: 579 respondents to a 16-question survey

Residents vs. non-resident (566): 98% (554) residents; 2% (12) non-residents.

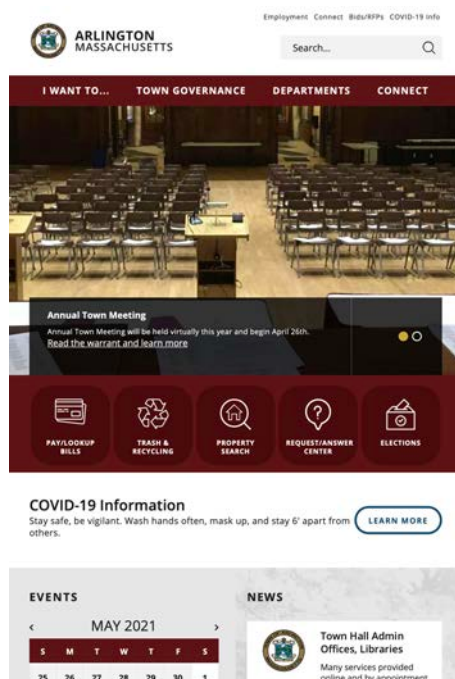
Work in Arlington (566): 25% (141) yes; 75% (425) no.

Arlington Business Owners (566): 9% (51) yes; 91% (515) no.

Demographics (566): 24% (133) respondents were between the ages of 55-64; 20% (113) were 65-74; 20% (112) were 45-54, 17% (96) were 35-44; 8% (43) 25-34; 6% (36) were 75-84; 2% (10) were 85+, 1% (4) was under 25; and 3% (19) preferred not to answer.

Report Structure

- Executive summary and action items identified as a result of this survey are listed on the next page.
- Full survey results are on the following pages.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unsurprisingly, frequency of visits to the website increased since the 2019 survey. It is reasonable to attribute these changes to the COVID-19 pandemic as the Town provided many services online and interest in public health information significantly increased. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a 50% increase in page views according to website traffic (1.6M vs 2.4M) and a whopping 71% increase in visits/sessions (600K vs 1M).¹ Overall, survey respondents were satisfied to very satisfied with the changes to the website, general communications, and crisis communications. This report includes respondent comments that were representative of comments received, plus a selection of comments on the “what we are doing well” and “where there is room for improvement” questions, but first some highlights.

Website Design Update

A majority of respondents reported overall satisfaction with the redesign (66%) and other elements such as homepage layout (66%), top navigation menu (64%), text size (67%), and background and text colors (63%). Only 5% or lower reported being dissatisfied these same elements. 53% of respondents reported “Have not noticed or used” when asked about mobile device viewing, thus satisfaction here was only 29% with 6% dissatisfied.

Town Notices (email)

Respondents who reported receiving Town Notices (90%) are highly engaged with them, with 82% reporting they read nearly all or most of each email. A large proportion of respondents, 83%, reported that the frequency of Town Notices is just about right, up from 81% since the last survey. There was a significant increase in satisfaction with the content of Town Notice emails, with **94% of respondents reported they are “Very informed” or “Informed,”** up from 73% in 2019. As in prior years’ surveys, respondents continue to report that Town Notices are an effective and appreciated method to be informed about Town initiatives, activities, and emergency operations.

Crisis Communications / COVID-19 Pandemic

Web, Email, Social Media, Arlington Alerts

For both Town Notices (email) and Arlington Alerts (phone, email, and text) the majority of respondents felt the frequency was “about the right amount,” with 79% for Town Notices and 74% for Arlington Alerts; social media trailed at 39%. Social media had the highest percentage of respondents that do not subscribe/follow (55%), followed by Arlington Alerts (16%) and Town Notices (8%). A majority of respondents visited the COVID-19 section of the website to view COVID-19 case counts (57%) or view latest safety protocols and restrictions (51%) followed by 23% that visited to view a list of open businesses, 20% to watch COVID-19 video updates by the Town Manager, and 6% to make a donation. One quarter of respondents reported they do not visit the page. With respect to “being informed” about the Town’s response to COVID-19, 52% responded that they were “well informed” and only 3% responded that they were “not very informed.” In hindsight, this question could have been phrased better, as the answer options of “No opinion” (24%) and “Neutral” (21%) do not reveal that much or suggest potential actions the Town could take.

Action Items at a Glance

- Review survey results with content posters and other communication stakeholders.
- Find ways to increase subscriptions to Town Notices. From tax bills to community outreach, it is clear that Town Notices are an effective and desired method of communication, but the Town currently has approximately 5,600 subscribers. There are approximately 19,000 households in Arlington.

¹ 2020 Annual Report. Town of Arlington, MA. p. 10

SURVEY RESULTS

Methodology

The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and publicized on the Town's website, Town Notices, local media, and social media channels.

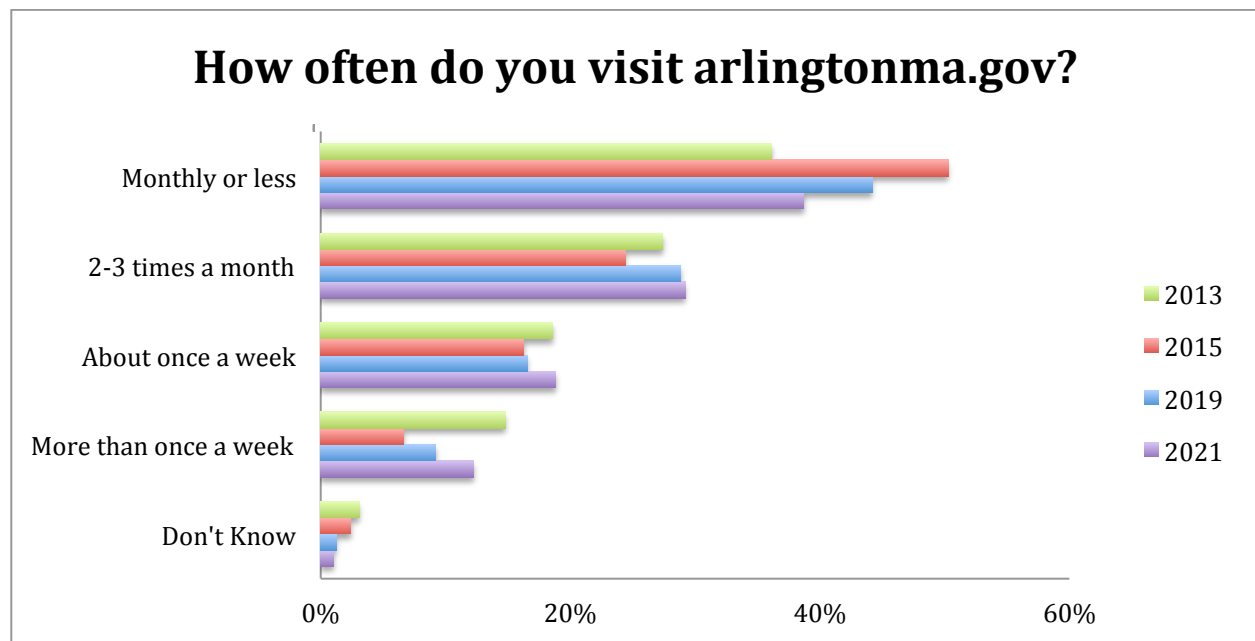
Frequency of Visits to Town Website

579 Respondents

Most respondents report they visit the website monthly or less (39%), with 29% reporting they visit 2-3 times per month and 19% visit about once per week. 12% percent report they visit more than once per week.

Comparison From Last Three Surveys

Comparing respondent answers over the last 4 surveys (below), frequency of site visits has rebounded a bit since the 2019 survey. The proportion of respondents who visit monthly or less has decreased, while there were increases to respondents who visit 2-3 times per month, about once a week, and more than one a week. It is reasonable to attribute these changes to the COVID-19 pandemic where the Town provided many services online and the interest in public health information significantly increased. Website traffic between 2019 and 2020 increased by 50% increase (1.6M vs 2.4M page views) and individual visits/sessions to the website increased by a whopping 71% (600K vs 1M).²



² 2020 Annual Report. Town of Arlington, MA. p. 10

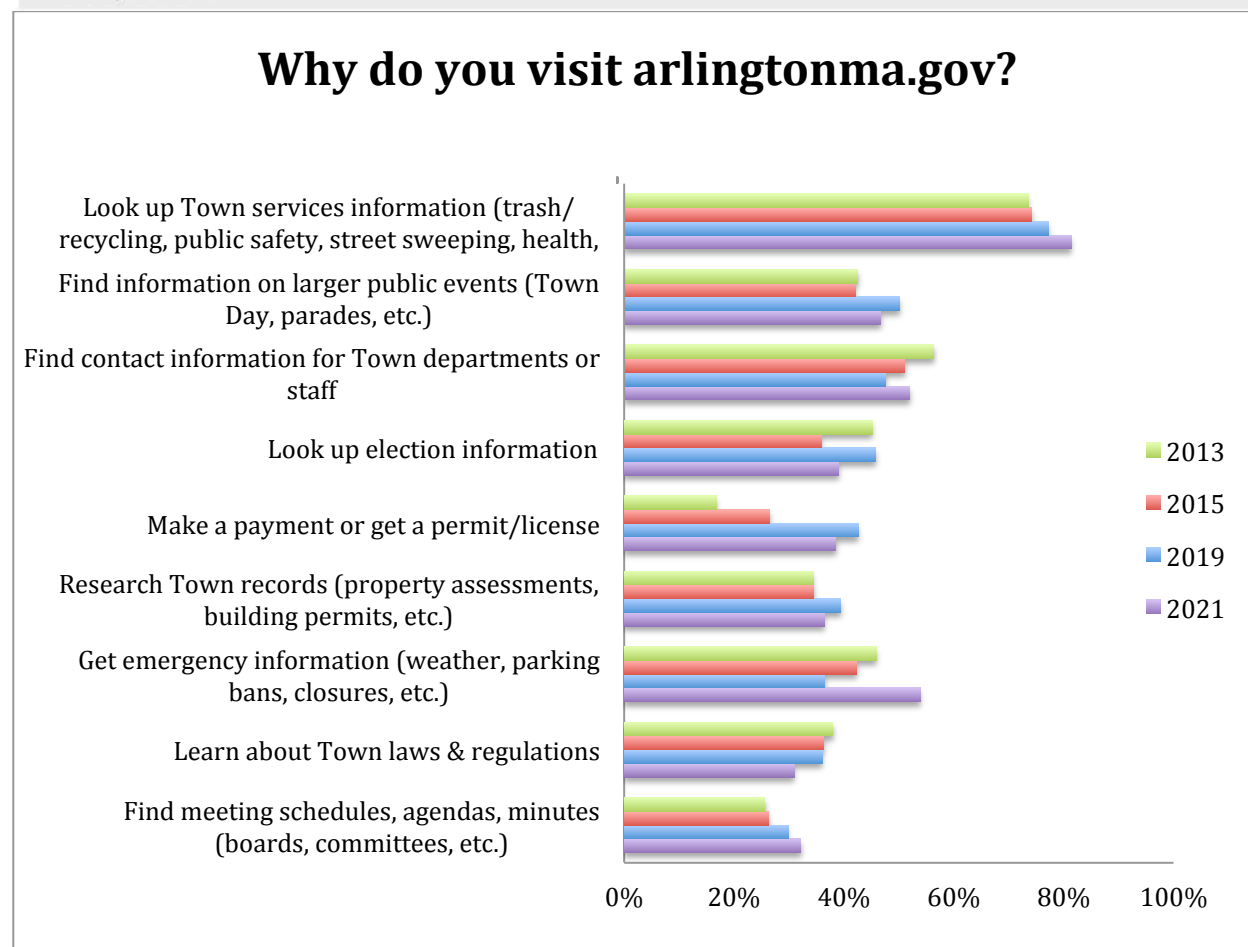
Why Respondents Visit the Town's Website

579 Respondents

Comparison From Last Three Surveys

As shown in the charts below, "Look up Town services" continues to be the top reason visitors come to the website. "Get emergency information" surged from previous surveys, while finding meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes continues its upward trend. There is a decrease in the selection "making a payment or get a permit/license," but that could be attributed to improvements in the online payment systems, such as an autopay feature and email reminders that come direct from our 3rd party vendor, Invoice Cloud. More analysis would be needed to determine the exact reason. Finding contact information continues to be of high interest to website visitors as is finding information about larger public events.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ To look up Town services information (e.g., trash/recycling, public safety, street sweeping, health)	81.35% 471
▼ To get emergency information (e.g., COVID-19, parking bans, office closures, etc.)	53.89% 312
▼ To find contact information for Town departments, staff, or elected officials	51.99% 301
▼ To find information on public events (Town Day, parades, etc.)	46.63% 270
▼ To look up election information	39.03% 226
▼ To make payments or apply for a permit/license	38.51% 223
▼ To research Town records (e.g., property assessments, building permits)	36.44% 211
▼ To find meeting schedules, agendas, minutes (e.g., for boards and committees)	32.12% 186
▼ To learn about Town laws & regulations	30.92% 179
Total Respondents: 579	



Measuring Website Design Update Satisfaction

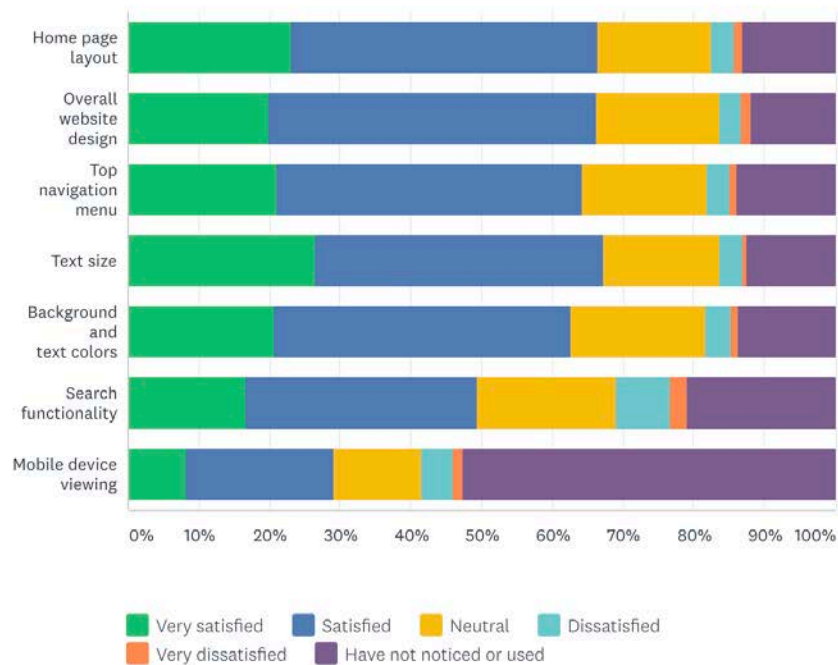
579 Respondents

Feature	Very satisfied and satisfied	Dissatisfied and very dissatisfied
Home page layout	66%	5%
Overall website design	66%	5%
Top navigation menu	64%	4%
Text size	67%	4%
Background and text colors	63%	5%
Mobile device viewing	29%	6%
Search functionality	50%	10%

The majority of respondents are satisfied with the changes to the updated website, with 5% or fewer respondents dissatisfied in most categories. An area for further exploration is the mobile device functionality, for which 53% of respondents reported “Have not noticed or used.” Further exploration may reveal a need for additional promotion or a lack of interest in conducting business with the Town via mobile devices.

In October, 2020 the Town completed a redesign of the Town website. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the features on the NEW website below.

Answered: 579 Skipped: 0



	VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	NEUTRAL	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	HAVE NOT NOTICED OR USED	TOTAL
Home page layout	23.05% 133	43.33% 250	16.12% 93	3.29% 19	1.21% 7	13.00% 75	577
Overall website design	19.97% 115	46.35% 267	17.36% 100	3.13% 18	1.39% 8	11.81% 68	576
Top navigation menu	21.15% 121	43.01% 246	17.83% 102	3.15% 18	1.05% 6	13.81% 79	572
Text size	26.53% 152	40.66% 233	16.58% 95	3.14% 18	0.70% 4	12.39% 71	573
Background and text colors	20.70% 119	41.91% 241	19.13% 110	3.65% 21	0.87% 5	13.74% 79	575
Search functionality	16.72% 96	32.58% 187	19.69% 113	7.67% 44	2.44% 14	20.91% 120	574
Mobile device viewing	8.19% 47	20.91% 120	12.54% 72	4.36% 25	1.39% 8	52.61% 302	574

Respondent Comments

*"1) The Website redesign - overall functionality, top banner leads, colors, et al. - is really good.
2) COVID-19 information, updates, etc. : THANK YOU."*

"Love the new website design. Looks much more modern than the previous one and is easier to use."

"Mobile usability of the website is much better."

"I really like the new website navigation bar and find the categories to be quite intuitive."

"new website is much more user friendly"

"Very good format, font and text on new website. Top menu is great improvement"

"There are so many ways for an Arlington resident to be informed. We have found what methods work best for us, and feel well informed. Keep up the good work!"

"The website is great and the emails are great. All the information is there for us to track down when we need it and fairly easy to navigate the new interface."

Town Notices

[Town Notices](#) are email notifications issued by the Town. They typically include public health and public works alerts, election information, office closures, trash and recycling alerts, and information on Town events. The following questions pertain to non-COVID-19 communications; questions regarding COVID-19 communication are in the next section of these survey results.

Do you currently receive Town Notice emails?

587 Respondents

90% (523) | Yes
7% (39) | No
3% (16) | Not Sure

Those who answered “yes” to the previous question were asked:

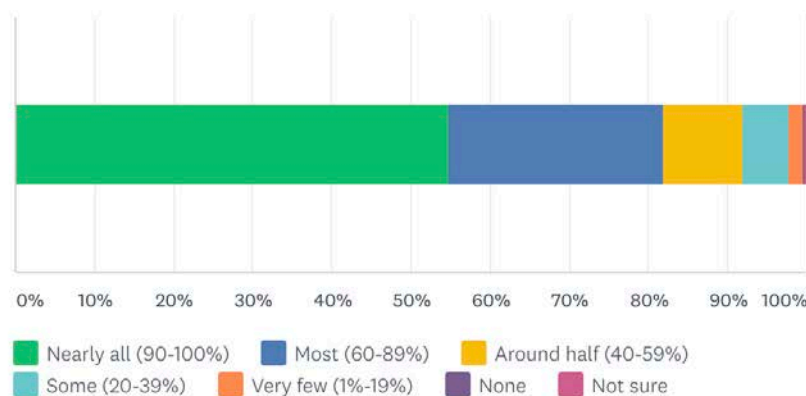
On average, what proportion of Town Notice emails do you read?

521 respondents

82% (427) reported they read “Nearly all” or “Most” (60-100%)
10% (52) reported they read “Around half” of them (40-59%)
8% (40) reported they read “Some” or “very few” (1-19%)

On average, what proportion of Town Notice emails do you read?

Answered: 521 Skipped: 58



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Nearly all (90-100%)	54.89%	286
Most (60-89%)	27.06%	141
Around half (40-59%)	9.98%	52
Some (20-39%)	5.95%	31
Very few (1%-19%)	1.73%	9
None	0.19%	1
Not sure	0.19%	1
TOTAL		521

Frequency of Town Notices 521 Respondents

83% | About the right amount (82% in 2019)

8% | Too much (8% in 2019)

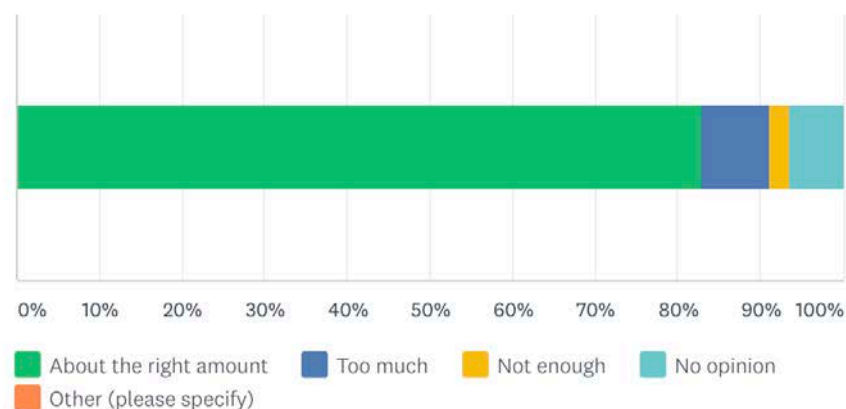
2% | Not enough (3% in 2019)

7% | No opinion (8% in 2019)

A large percentage of respondents (83%) report the frequency of Town Notices is just about right, similar to the responses to the same question in the 2019 survey. 8% felt Town Notice emails are too frequent, while 2% reported they are not sent often enough.

How would you categorize the frequency of Town Notice emails?

Answered: 521 Skipped: 58



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ About the right amount	82.92%	432
▼ Too much	8.25%	43
▼ Not enough	2.30%	12
▼ No opinion	6.53%	34
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 0.00%	0
TOTAL		521

Respondent Comments

"All information is clear and helpful and the frequency is just right"

"It's easy to find contact information. The email notification frequency is good. People working in the town office are very helpful and caring."

"I recently signed up for the Town Notices - not sure how I heard about them - and have enjoyed receiving them. I tend not to go to websites unless directed and sent a link."

How Informed Respondents Are About Town Initiatives/Activities

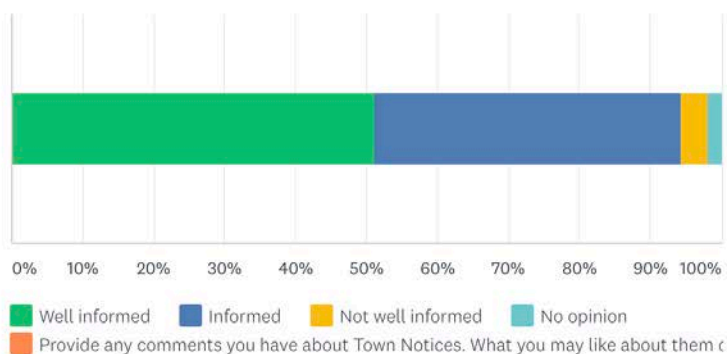
521 Respondents

94% | Very Informed/Informed (73% in 2019)
4% | Somewhat Informed (23% in 2019)
2% | Not Very Informed (3% in 2019)

Responses to this question indicate a significant change in how well-informed respondents feel about Town initiatives and activities since 2019: **94% of respondents reported based on Town Notices they are “Very informed” or “Informed,” up from 73% in 2019.** In this survey 4% reported being “Somewhat Informed” and 2% “Not Very Informed,” while in 2019, 23% reported being “Somewhat Informed,” and “3% Not Very Informed.”

Please indicate how informed Town Notice emails keep you about Town activities, news, and initiatives.

Answered: 521 Skipped: 58



Respondent Comments

“I do feel well-informed, and it's easy to tell which portions of the town notice emails are interesting to me. I have not had difficulty finding information on the town website. The new website homepage does display nicely on mobile.”

“I really appreciate the town emails. I have never lived in a city or town with this mode of communication (in part, a product of changes in our use of technology); but I feel more informed and connected to the town as a result of these emails.”

“I find the Town notice emails very helpful. They are brief, to-the-point, and let me know where to look if I need more info.”

Crisis Communications and COVID-19

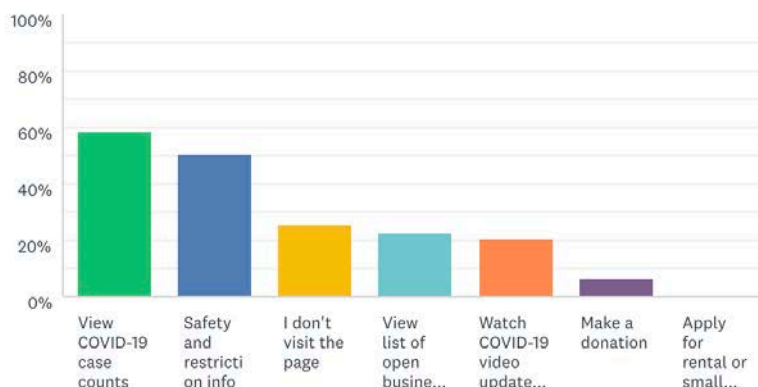
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the Town has communicated through a variety of channels to keep the community informed about new public safety protocols, regulations, resources for assistance, and opportunities for helping those in need. This information is located on the COVID-19 information page at arlingtonma.gov/covid19.

Why visit arlingtonma.gov/covid19? 566 respondents

A majority of respondents visited the COVID-19 section of the website to view COVID-19 case counts (59%) or view latest safety protocols and restrictions (51%), followed by 23% who wanted to view a list of open businesses, 20% to watch COVID-19 video updates by the Town Manager, and 6% to make a donation. A quarter of respondents reported they do not visit the page.

Please check your top reasons for visiting arlingtonma.gov/covid19. (Select all that apply.)

Answered: 566 Skipped: 13



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
View COVID-19 case counts	58.66%	332
View latest safety protocols and restrictions	50.53%	286
I don't visit the page	25.27%	143
View list of open businesses in Arlington	22.44%	127
Watch COVID-19 video updates from the Town Manager	20.32%	115
Make donations (e.g., PPE or to the COVID-19 Relief Fund)	6.36%	36
Apply for rental or small business assistance	0.71%	4
Total Respondents: 566		

Respondent Comments

"Love the email updates! So grateful for the excellent communication during covid. I was much better informed than friends in neighboring communities."

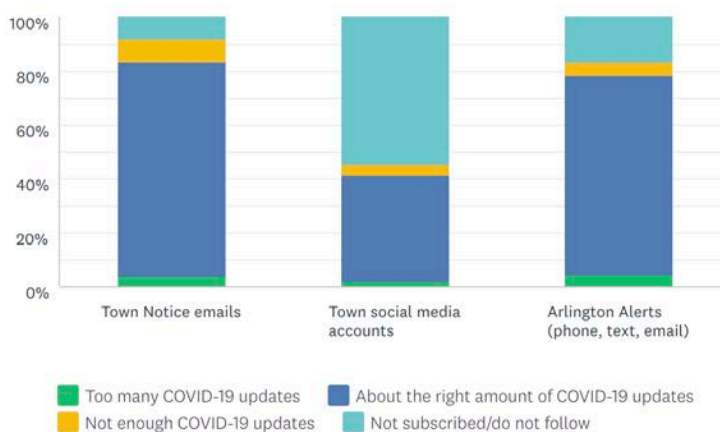
"Appreciate that the information available through the website is comprehensive and generally easy to find. Good job being a functioning town government in the 21st century (sincerely)."

Categorize the current frequency of COVID-19 Updates by communication channel.

For both Town Notices (email) and Arlington Alerts (phone, email, and text) the majority of respondents felt the frequency was “about the right amount,” with 79% for Town Notices and 74% for Arlington Alerts; social media trailed at 39%. More than half (55%) of respondents noted that they do not subscribe/follow the Town’s social media accounts; 16% did not subscribe to Arlington Alerts (16%), and 8% did not subscribe to Town Notices. Respondents that reported the Town did not send enough communication ranged from 4-9% across all channels and 5% felt there were too many communications.

How would you categorize the CURRENT frequency of COVID-19 Updates on the following channels:

Answered: 566 Skipped: 13



	TOO MANY COVID-19 UPDATES	ABOUT THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF COVID-19 UPDATES	NOT ENOUGH COVID-19 UPDATES	NOT SUBSCRIBED/DO NOT FOLLOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Town Notice emails	3.89% 22	79.47% 449	8.67% 49	7.96% 45	565	2.21
Town social media accounts	1.80% 10	39.46% 219	4.14% 23	54.59% 303	555	3.12
Arlington Alerts (phone, text, email)	4.27% 24	74.20% 417	5.16% 29	16.37% 92	562	2.34

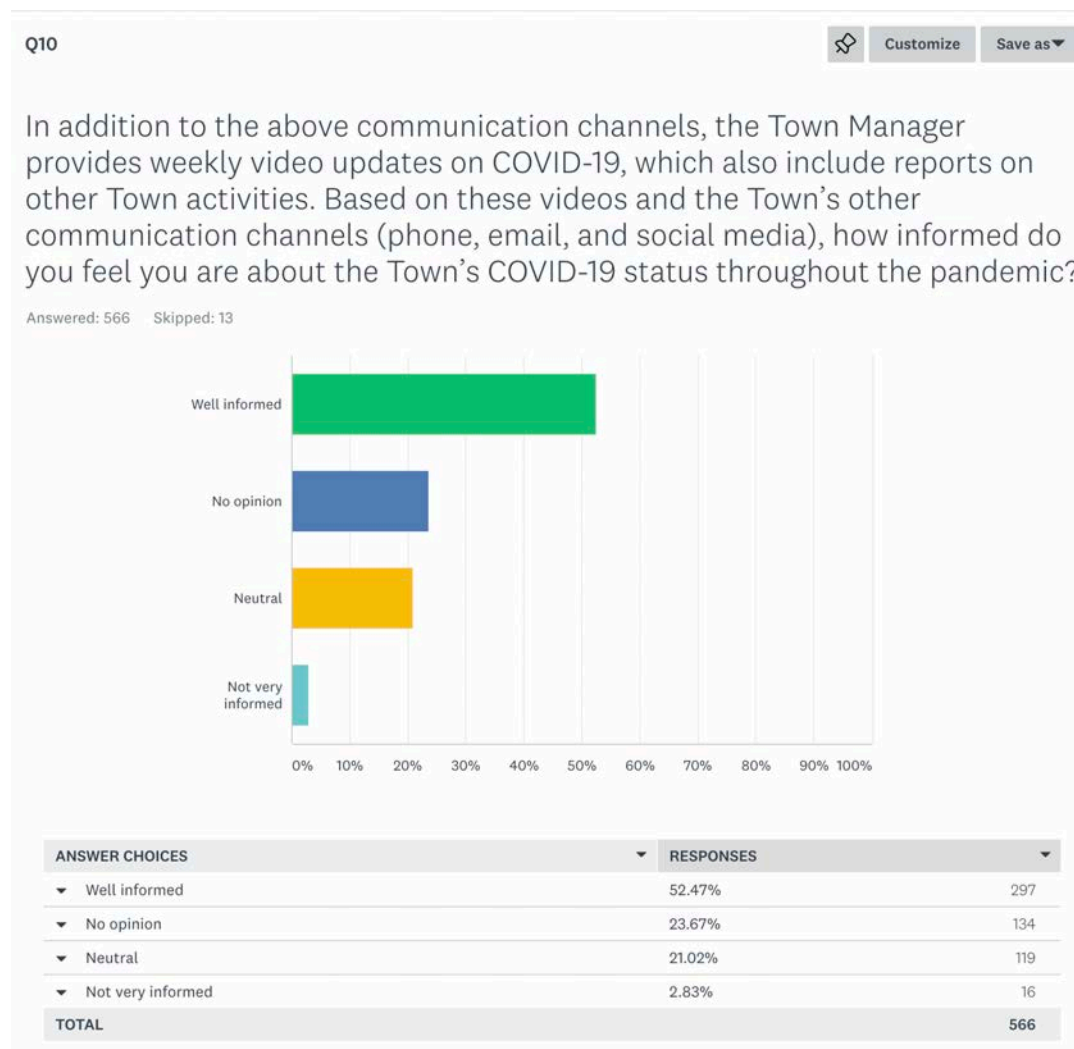
Respondent Comments

“Daily COVID case counts are appreciated!”

“Communications feel dependable and helpful.”

“Very well. I especially appreciate the Town Manager videos.”

How informed do you feel about the Town's COVID-19 status throughout the pandemic?
 With respect to "being informed" about the Town's' response to COVID-19, 52% responded that they were "well informed" and only 3% responded that they were "not very informed." In hindsight, this question could have been phrased better, as the answer options of "No opinion" (24%) and "Neutral" (21%) do not reveal that much or suggest potential actions the Town could take.



"I think the town is doing a great job of keeping us informed on the level of COVID cases in the town and measures the town is taking to prevent the spread."

"Doing a great job conveying calm and confidence during the craziness - it feels like I am in good hands as an Arlingtonian. I appreciate that many people in Town government did not sign up for such a stressful job and have had to step up to such an extent."

"Thank you for Keeping us informed!"

"Your COVID-19 communications have been excellent!"

"Carrying on in very challenging times! Thank you!"

The survey posed two open-ended questions to ascertain the performance of Town communications and to gather ideas for areas where improvement could be made. A selection of representative comments are provided below.

What are we doing well?

"The COVID updates have been excellent, most especially the interviews with Adam. The regular alerts and emails are also very helpful (especially things like delays in trash pickup, etc.)"

"I appreciate all of Adam Chapdelaine's informative interviews as well as the interviews with the heads of other departments. I feel reassured when I listen to them. Thank you!"

"Larger print on website is great-more accessible for seniors. Update videos from Town Manager are important and appreciated."

"I've lived in Arlington for nearly 30 years, it's a great place to live. Keep up the good work."

"Easy to find dates for town events/trash changes and easy to find snow emergency info."

"I really enjoyed the series of Community Conversations about racism, diversity, and inclusion over the summer. I would love to see more of this series, as well as more advertising/driving of awareness for these events."

"You are trying to relay information to Arlington residents in a form that they will read."

"Subject lines of emails show at a glance what's in it, so I know whether to open it. I love the large font on the web. The new bill-payment site works well, and I look forward to water bills moving there. I also love the ability to pay property tax with automatic payments."

"I'm very impressed with the way Arlington collaborated with 3 other towns to run COVID vaccine clinic for first responders. Hoping same will happen for vaccinating citizens. You have a history of doing flu clinics well. Board of Health does outstanding work. Excited about new high school and efforts that were made for community input."

"Giving people accurate info."

"My general sense is that this is a well- run town with good and smart people working hard to do a good job."

"We are new residents, and...so far, everything is fine."

"I am really thrilled with DPW's new highly targeted notifications for street sweeping and hydrant flushing."

"Providing information with clarity."

"Your Web site is helpful. Also, I am impressed with the overall management of the town.....budgets, town services etc. Very professional and doing it right!!"

"Email notices, sharing info on meetings, activities, agendas, being willing to consider public opinion on various issues and to make changes."

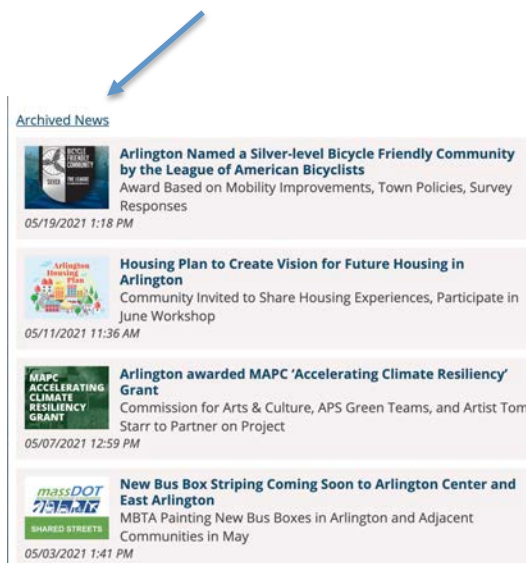
"Communication has been OK and high-level handling of social issues like the handling of Defund the Police/Support the Police has been excellent."

Where is there room for improvement?

Comment: *"It would be nice to have a way to look at archived news chronologically."*

Town Response: There is! Well, reverse chronology. Just click the "More News" button. When you are in the News List mode, click the "Archive News" link at the top of the list. News is sorted by most recent posting.

The only time a News article is listed higher, is when it has been "pinned to the top." We try to limit this behavior to only a couple at a time.



Comment: *"I've noticed that when trying to navigate from one department page to another, sometimes the picture on the page blocks out much of the dropdown from the navigation bar on the top of the page."*

Town Response: Thanks for reporting, this has been fixed.

Comment: *"Realize and accept you are not going to make everyone happy... and that is okay."*

Town Response: Agreed. Thanks for that affirmation.

Comment: *"It would be great if you could post the text from the town manager's video updates in addition to posting the video. The videos take too long to listen to, but I'd love to be able to skim through the content!"*

Town Response: We'll look into it.

Comment: *"It's too early for me to draw any conclusions on deficiencies."*

Town Response: We'll try not to disappoint!

Comment: *"I have discussed the search engine with the website manager before; compared with search engines on other websites (not including other town websites), our website search engine does not catch enough key words to send users to the right website. I am aware if I scroll down far enough, I might find what I am looking for; but ... that doesn't seem 'modern' enough. Can we research using a better search engine? Otherwise; THANK YOU for working so hard on this website which does 98% of what it needs to do very well."*

Town Response: Improving search functionality is always a goal and we will talk to our vendor to see if we can make improvements in this area. Happy to hear you think we're doing 98% of this "very well."